

# New Faith in Ancient Lands

Western Missions in the Middle East in the  
Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

*Edited by*

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## INTRODUCTION

HELEEN MURRE-VAN DEN BERG

### *New Faith in Ancient Lands*

Over the centuries, the Middle East has held an important place in the religious consciousness of many Christians in West and East. To many, the region where Christ was born and Christianity first developed was imbued with special religious significance, expressed in holy places at which through buildings and other markers the link between Christian history and the present was made, as well as in eschatological expectations in which the region became the stage for the scenes of the end of times. In some periods, such religious concerns spread to larger parts of the Christian population. The prototypical example of a period of special Christian interest in the Middle East is the Crusader period. From the late eleventh to the late thirteenth century, the usual religious interest in the lands of the Bible and Christian history became included in a much larger cultural, political and economic discourse not only of the Western church but also of Western society in general. The articles in this volume suggest that there is reason to assume that the nineteenth century may be considered as another example of such a period.

The history of nineteenth-century Western Christianity is characterized by a growing interest in the Middle East, which spread from being a minority concern of small groups within the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches, to a majority issue within the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches, in the United States and in a large number of European countries, the most important being Great Britain, France, Germany and Austria. A blend of enduring interest in the holy places, mounting eschatological and millennial expectations in connection to the Middle East, renewed motivation for missionary activities (directed to many parts of the non-Western world, but with particular fervor to the ancient lands that constituted the “birth-place of Christianity”), and growing colonial and imperial interests in the region, induced an era of unparalleled Western Christian activities in this region. It is these activities, especially those that fall under

the label of ‘mission’, that form the leading theme of this book.

When surveying the range of mission studies focusing on the Middle East, it appears that, despite a good number of publications on individual missions, up-to-date overviews and comparative studies are scarce.<sup>1</sup> In addition, comparative studies in which both Roman Catholic and Protestant missions (let alone the Russian Orthodox missions) are taken into account are hard to find.<sup>2</sup> In a number of more recent volumes on the nineteenth and early twentieth-century missions the Middle East plays no part, although the themes of imperialism and mission policy in the context of British and American missions would certainly have allowed for such inclusions.<sup>3</sup> The present volume, arising from a symposium organized at the Faculty of Theology of the Universiteit Leiden in January 2005,<sup>4</sup> does not pretend to remedy all these evils. However, the volume testifies to the

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<sup>1</sup> A notable recent exception to this is Dominique Trimbur, Ran Aaronsohn (eds.), *De Bonaparte à Balfour. La France, l'Europe occidentale et la Palestine, 1799–1917* (Paris, 2001), and soon to be published, Michael Marten and Martin Tamcke (eds.), *Christian Witness Between Continuity and New Beginnings: Modern Historical Missions in the Middle East*, Studien zur Orientalischen Kirchengeschichte (Hamburg, 2006). For two short overviews, see my “Nineteenth-century Protestant Missions and Middle Eastern Women: An Overview”, in Inger Marie Okkenhaug and Ingvild Flakerud (eds.), *Gender, Religion and Change in the Middle East. Two Hundred Years of History* (Oxford, New York, 2005), 103–22, and “The Middle East: Western Missions and the Eastern Churches, Islam and Judaism,” in Sheridan Gilley and Brian Stanley (eds.), *World Christianities, c. 1815–1914*, The Cambridge History of Christianity 8 (Cambridge, 2006), 458–472.

<sup>2</sup> In this volume, the considerable and influential Russian Orthodox involvement, also missionary, geopious and colonial in character, will be largely ignored. For an overview, see T. G. Stavrou, *Russian Interests in Palestine (1882–1914). A Study of Religious and Educational Enterprise* (Thessaloniki, 1963) and Derek Hopwood, *The Russian Presence in Syria and Palestine 1843–1914: Church and Politics in the Near East* (London, 1969).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. recent volumes in the series Studies in the History of Christian Mission: Andrew Porter (ed.), *The Imperial Horizons of British Protestant Missions, 1880–1914* (Grand Rapids, 2003); Brian Stanley (ed.), *Missions, Nationalisms and the End of Empire* (Grand Rapids, 2003); Wilbert R. Shenk (ed.), *North American Foreign Missions, 1810–1914. Theology, Theory, and Policy* (Grand Rapids, 2004) (with the notable exception of Paul Harris’ article “Denominationalism and Democracy: Ecclesiastical Issues Underlying Rufus Anderson’s Three Self Program,” 61–85). Note that in Andrew Porter’s *Religion versus Empire? British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700–1914* (Manchester, 2004), the Middle East is indeed taken into account.

<sup>4</sup> I would like to express my sincere thanks to Charlotte van der Leest who organized this conference with unflinching good humor and to a great extent contributed to the smooth proceedings and relaxed atmosphere. I also thank the institutions that generously contributed to the funding of the meeting: Leiden University, LUF (Leids Universiteits Fonds) and NWO (Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research, Humanities).

significant developments in historical mission studies over the last decade, also in connection with the Middle East.<sup>5</sup> In this introduction I will attempt to sketch a few general lines that have emerged out of the comparison of the various missions as they were presented by the participants of the symposium.

During the preparatory stage of the symposium, the main request to the participants had been to reflect, from the perspective of their knowledge of a particular part of mission history, on the relationship between the high ideals of the missionaries and the practicalities on the ground. What had been the missionaries' aims and objectives, and what were they able to realize in practice? What influence on the missions was exerted by missionary administrators and home supporters on the one hand, and by local notables, religious leaders and 'common people' on the other? Were there significant differences in this respect between the many missions in the Middle East? Were such differences caused by their denominational backgrounds? Or was nationality a more important factor?

A volume such as this can represent only a small part of the diversity and complexity of Middle Eastern missions, and it is to my regret that also in this book Roman Catholic missions are underrepresented. However, a few tentative answers to these questions will be formulated, based on the contributions at the symposium (most of which are published in this volume), but also taking into account other research. I will first present a brief outline of the history of missions in the Middle East, paying particular attention to the ongoing competition between the various organizations that worked in the Middle East. The major rivalry, familiar to all students of nineteenth-century missions, was that between Protestants and Roman Catholics. Competition and strife also characterized the relationships between the various Protestant and Roman Catholic organizations, whereas in the Middle East, Russian Orthodox missions also took part in the

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<sup>5</sup> See also the bibliography at the end, which has been extracted from the contributions to this volume. In this introductory article I have purposely included a number of references to important articles and monographs of the last fifteen years that touch on missions not represented in the other contributions to this volume. In addition, the fruitful discussions at the symposium *The Social Dimension of Mission in the Middle East (19th and 20th century)* in Kaiserswerth (Düsseldorf, 12–15 March 2006), organized by Uwe Kaminsky and Roland Löffler, provided further input to this introduction.

contest. In this fierce competition for influence among the local population, nationalist and imperialist concerns played a considerable role, increasingly so in the later decades of the nineteenth century.

The historical overview will be followed by a discussion of two themes that were particularly prominent in the contributions. The first of these appears to be a defining characteristic of Middle Eastern missions, the 'Holy Land discourse' in its theoretical and practical ramifications, which also touch upon the connections with colonialist and imperialist aims of the Western powers of the time. The second theme is that of the tension between 'conversionist' and 'civilizational' missionary aims. Partly a matter of theory versus practice, but also one of a variety of possible interpretations 'on the ground', this theme plays a role in almost all contributions.

*Missions in the Middle East: an overview*

Western missions in the Middle East have a long history. In Palestine, the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land was established in 1217. In the aftermath of the Crusades, missionaries of the Dominican and Franciscan orders became active in Syria, Persia and Central Asia.<sup>6</sup> The results of these early attempts were neither many nor long-lasting. In the seventeenth century, missionary activities were taken up with new fervor by the Propaganda Fide, initiating and nourishing a significant uniate movement among the Eastern churches, especially in Syria, Turkey and Mesopotamia, the region that in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries had been incorporated into the Ottoman Empire.<sup>7</sup> In addition to the earlier mendicant orders, many of which were still active in the region, the Jesuits began to play an important role. Giuseppe Buffon's contribution and the joint article by Bernard Heyberger and Chantal Verdeil take their starting point in this formative period of Roman Catholic missions in the Middle East. For a variety of reasons, among which the back-

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<sup>6</sup> Jean Richard, *La papauté et les mission d'orient au moyen age (XIII<sup>e</sup>-XV<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, Collection de l'École Française de Rome 33 (Rome, 1998<sup>2</sup>).

<sup>7</sup> Bernard Heyberger, *Les chrétiens du Proche Orient au temps de la réforme catholique*, Bibliothèque des Écoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome 284 (Rome, 1994), Bruce Masters, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World: The Roots of Sectarianism* (Cambridge, 2001).

lash of the French Revolution and the suppression of the Jesuit order in 1773, the presence of the Roman Catholic missions had become relatively weak by the early decades of the nineteenth century.

It was in this period that in the Anglo-Saxon countries as well as on the European continent Protestant missionary fervor awakened in connection with the Evangelical awakenings of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The British Church Missionary Society (CMS) was the first to become active in the Middle East and in 1815 established a post at Malta, then a British possession, as a base for further eastward expansion. Other early attempts were those of the Basel Mission in the Caucasus, starting in 1821 (again in connection to a colonial enterprise), and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (American Board), which sent its first missionaries to Palestine in 1819. The early years of the American Board form the starting point for the papers by Habib Badr and Ellen Fleischmann, both focusing on Beirut, where American Board missionaries began working in 1824. Ussama Makdisi's contribution to the symposium,<sup>8</sup> was also concerned with the early years of the American Board mission in Lebanon. One of the various factors that motivated Protestant mission work in the early nineteenth century was a growing anti-Catholicism among American and British Protestants. Not surprisingly, in publications on missions in the Middle East, where Roman Catholic missions had long been active, anti-Catholic rhetoric played a significant role.<sup>9</sup>

While the American Board and the CMS carved out their positions in the Ottoman and Persian Empires, Roman Catholic missionary institutions began to recover and at various places initiated new mission work, not in the last place out of a desire to counteract what they saw as dangerous influence of the Protestants among the Eastern Christians. In this volume, the work of the Jesuits in Syria (including what is now Lebanon) features in the paper by Heyberger and Verdeil; that of the Lazarists in Persia was discussed

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<sup>8</sup> "Playing God on a New Frontier: The Early Experience of the American Board Mission to Syria."

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Murre-van den Berg, "‘Simply by giving to them macaroni . . .’ Anti-Roman Catholic polemics in early Protestant missions in the Middle East (1820–1860)", to appear in Marten and Tamcke (eds.), *Christian Witness Between Continuity and New Beginnings*, 63–80.



in the symposium by Thomas O'Flynn.<sup>10</sup> The Jesuit order and the Lazarist congregation, however different in many respects, may both serve as examples of a new type of Roman Catholic missions that in method and focus was rather similar to that of the Protestants. Buffon's paper focuses on the challenge put by the arrival of these new Catholic congregations to the long-established Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land, laying bare the internal rivalries that marred both the Catholic and Protestant missionary movements. In addition, O'Mahony's paper comments upon the tensions between the Franciscans and the developing uniate churches, *in casu* the Coptic Catholic Church of Egypt.

In the late 40s, these rather modest beginnings of Roman Catholic and Protestant missions began to branch out in a wealth of activities, in turn attracting many new organizations as well as single individuals eager to contribute to this spiritual enterprise. Western political interests in the region increased, leading to combinations of political and ecclesial interests such as the establishment of the Anglo-Prussian bishopric in Jerusalem in 1841, in turn hastening the re-establishment of the Latin patriarchate in 1847. Both institutions were meant to coordinate Western missionary activities, but on the Protestant as well as the Roman Catholic side individual missionaries and small organizations were difficult to control. One example of such an individual missionary was Mathilda Creasy, whose murder in 1858 is the subject of Nancy Stockdale's paper. On the German side, too, not all organizations were willing to submit to the priorities of the bishopric, especially not during the episcopate of the former CMS missionary, the Swiss Samuel Gobat. He decided to redirect the efforts of the missions under the bishopric's responsibility from the Palestine Jews to the Middle-Eastern Christians. Charlotte van der Leest's contribution to the symposium focused on the numerous difficulties that arose between Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants in Palestine because of the clear conversionist message that characterized the primary 'Bible' schools established by Gobat.<sup>11</sup> As shown by Uwe Kaminsky, the Kaiserswerth Deaconesses, in Jerusalem since

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<sup>10</sup> "The Catholic Mission in Urmia and Persian Azarbaijan: the Experience of the Lazarists". This contribution was based on O'Flynn's doctoral thesis: "The Western Christian Presence in the Caucasus and Qajar Persia, 1802-70" (University of Oxford, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> "Protestant Missionary Schools in Palestine (1846-1879): Instrument of

1851, shared most of Gobat's priorities. They saw their more practical methods, which included social work and the professional education of women, as supporting his conversionist mission. Johann Ludwig Schneller, however, who established the Syrian Orphanage, over the years set his own agenda, concentrating on social and educational work among the poorer parts of the Arabic-speaking Palestinian population, both Muslim and Christian. Roland Loeffler's article provides an up-to-date overview of the establishment and further development of this important institution in Jerusalem.

The 40s and 50s saw a rapid expansion of the missions of the American Board: the stations in Beirut, Istanbul and Urmia grew in terms of numbers of missionaries and activities, overcame initial difficulties, and contributed to the organization of Protestant churches. This process is described in Badr's contribution and also mentioned in Fleischmann's.<sup>12</sup> New missions were initiated, such as the one among the Armenians in Kharpert in Eastern Anatolia, the topic of Barbara Merguerian's paper. Another important mission started in this period was the American Presbyterian mission in Egypt (1854), which consciously departed from the more cautious missionary methods of earlier CMS missionaries.<sup>13</sup> Its post-war ramifications feature in Umar Ryad's contribution. The growing Catholic efforts were also mentioned in O'Flynn's description of the Lazarist mission in Persia.

A more aggressive and self-conscious attitude among Protestant missionaries can be detected especially in the 70s and 80s of the nineteenth century. New generations of missionaries entered the field, many of which were motivated by fresh waves of evangelical enthusiasm in America and Great Britain. Almost all organizations began to renew their efforts among the Muslim population, a move that was facilitated by the growing Western influence in the region, which left less room for the Ottoman and Persian governments to oppose

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Conversion." This contribution is part of a forthcoming Leiden thesis, "Protestant Missionary Encounters with Arab Christians in the Holy Land: The Views, Policy and Conflicts of Evangelical Missionaries in Nineteenth-Century Palestine (1846–1979)."

<sup>12</sup> On the issue of local churches within the context of the American Board, see Harris "Denominationalism and Democracy," as well as Murre-van den Berg, "Why Protestant Churches? The American Board and the Eastern Churches: Mission among 'Nominal' Christians (1820–70)," in Pieter N. Holtrop and Hugh McLeod (eds.), *Mission and Missionaries* (Suffolk, 2000), 98–111.

<sup>13</sup> A. Watson, *The American Mission in Egypt, 1845 to 1896* (Pittsburgh, PA, 1898).

to such activities.<sup>14</sup> The activities of the CMS missionaries in Nablus, as described by Philippe Bourmaud, provide an insightful example of the ways in which missionaries were able to use the Ottoman administration to achieve their ends, overriding local opposition by the skilful way in which they employed British imperial connections with the High Porte. In many missions in the Middle East, British, American and German, a trend towards secularization of missionary activities can be detected. This may probably be explained from the converging of two developments: the growing wish to attract more Muslims, which encouraged downplaying the role of overt evangelization, and the world-wide trend towards developing sophisticated institutions for higher education (universities) and medical care (hospitals).<sup>15</sup> This required a different type of missionary, a woman or man who had been educated as a doctor or teacher, not as a minister or evangelist.<sup>16</sup> However, alongside these somewhat secularized and often liberal types of missions, missions with explicitly conversionist aims were continually re-introduced into the region, among which the early twentieth-century German missionaries in the Caucasus discussed by Martin Tamcke may perhaps be reckoned.

After the First World War, during which many activities were sus-

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<sup>14</sup> Among the large variety of new missions that were introduced into the region in this period, one should mention the American Dutch-Reformed mission in southern Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula, the CMS missions in Iran and Egypt, and the Anglican mission among the Assyrians. Compare Alfred DeWitt and Frederick J. Barny, *History of the Arabian Mission* (New York, 1926), Kenneth Cragg, "Being Made Disciples—The Middle East," in Kevin Ward & Brian Stanley (eds.), *The Church Mission Society and World Christianity, 1799–1999*, Studies in the History of Christian Missions (Grand Rapids, Cambridge, 2000), 120–143, in the same volume G. Francis-Dehqani, "CMS Women Missionaries in Persia: Perceptions of Muslim Women and Islam, 1998–1934," 91–119, and J. F. Coakley, *The Church of the East and the Church of England. A History of The Archbishop of Canterbury's Assyrian Mission* (Oxford, 1992).

<sup>15</sup> This trend towards medical institutions can also be observed with Jewish missions, like the Scottish mission in Tiberias, probably for similar reasons; cf. the recent work by Michael Marten, *Attempting to Bring the Gospel Home: Scottish Missions to Palestine, 1839–1917* (London, New York, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> For an overview and further literature on the changing roles of female missionaries in the Middle East, see Murre-van den Berg, "Nineteenth-century Protestant Missions" and the special volume of *Islam and Christian Muslim Relations* (9, 3, 1998), with contributions by E. A. Doumato, Ellen Fleischmann, F. H. Al-Sayegh and Inger Marie Okkenhaug. See also Okkenhaug's book on the later Anglican mission in Palestine: *The Quality of Heroic Living, of High Endeavor and Adventure: Anglican Mission, Women and Education in Palestine, 1888–1948*, Studies in Christian Mission 27 (Leiden 2002). For a Roman Catholic perspective, compare C. Langlois, "Les congrégations françaises en Terre Sainte au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle," in Trimbur, *De Bonaparte à Balfour*, 219–240.

pended while the remaining missionaries contributed significantly to relief work,<sup>17</sup> in many places mission work was resumed. The circumstances were often relatively favorable to such initiatives, at least in the countries that were under British and French mandates. However, as Ryad's article indicates, by this time the Muslim population and its religious leaders had become more outspoken and politically active, and in Egypt used the relative stable climate under the British Mandate to oppose missionary activities as much as they could. Despite such opposition, both Protestant and Roman Catholic missionary activities were continued.<sup>18</sup>

In the course of the twentieth century, the relative number of missionaries appears to have diminished somewhat, not in the least because Middle Eastern governments have been much more restrictive in admitting missionary activities than in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The secularist trend became stronger after the end of WWI, and was coupled with a growing ecumenical outlook on the part of many missionary organizations. In such secular and non-proselytizing form, missionary activities were usually acceptable to governments in the Middle East. At the same time, and with renewed force in the last decades of the twentieth century, new evangelical organizations originating in different parts of the world (no longer confined to Europe or North America, but also including countries such as South Korea and the Philippines) continued to preach, often clandestinely, the radical message of evangelical conversion to the people of the Middle East.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> It is especially the American organizations (American Board and Presbyterian Board of Missions) that organized large-scale relief work for the Armenians, the Syrian-Orthodox and Assyrians that were under threat in the Eastern parts of the Ottoman Empire and Persia; on the Assyrian situation, see, e.g., Gabriele Yonan, *Ein vergessener Holocaust: Die Vernichtung der christlichen Assyrer in der Türkei*, Pogrom 148/149 (Göttingen, 1989) and Michael Zirinsky, "American Presbyterian Missionaries at Urmia During the Great War," *Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies* 12,1 (1998), 6–27.

<sup>18</sup> So far, work on this later period has been relatively scarce, but compare the older overviews in Julius Richter, *Mission und Evangelisation im Orient* (Gütersloh, 1930, 2nd ed.), and in Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity 7: Advance through Storm: AD 1914 and After; With Concluding Generalizations* (New York, London, 1945). For the Egyptian context, see the references in Ryad's article, which include a few recent works.

<sup>19</sup> On the present situation, see Todd M. Johnson and David R. Scoggins, "Christian Missions and Islamic *Da'wah*: A Preliminary Quantitative Assessment," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 29,1 (2005), 8–11.

*Holy Land discourse*

The major characteristic that distinguished nineteenth-century Middle Eastern missions from missions elsewhere in the world is its deeply felt conviction that missions in this part of the world were motivated not only by the ‘obligation to the heathen’,<sup>20</sup> but also by a particular responsibility for what often were called the ‘Bible Lands’. In most articles in this volume this special position of missions in this region is reiterated in some form. The first two articles have this defining characteristic as their main topic: the first on the Jesuit Holy Land discourse, the second on an American Protestant interpretation of it. These articles suggest that Roman Catholic and Protestant missionary views on the Holy Land were surprisingly similar. Both contain three essential elements: (i) the positive attraction of the Holy Land as the scene of biblical and Christian history, resulting in the fruitful coupling of Christian pilgrimage and ‘geopieté’ with biblical scholarship; (ii) a negative interpretation of the Holy Land in terms of ‘decadence’, ‘material religion’, anti-modernism, Islamic ‘bigotry’, and general ‘backwardness’; and (iii) the view that the synthesis of these conflicting interpretations was to be found in Western interference through missions (introducing ‘spiritual’ or ‘true’ religion and modernity) as well as through politics (eventually resulting in the support of the colonialist venture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries). In addition, in some Roman Catholic and especially Protestant circles, eschatological discourses were employed to underline the importance of the region, sometimes viewing it as the scene of the conversion of the Jews that would usher in the millennium, sometimes as the eschatological battlefield between Islam and Christianity.

It was among the missionaries in Palestine that such ‘Christian Zionist’ ideas were most explicitly present.<sup>21</sup> The German missionary

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<sup>20</sup> Compare the title of the pamphlet by William Carey that has customarily been seen as the clarion call for Protestant missions in the nineteenth century: *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (London, 1792, various reprints). For a revisionist interpretation of these commonly-held beginnings of Protestant missions, see Brian Stanley “Christian Missions and the Enlightenment: A Reevaluation,” and Andrew F. Walls “The Eighteenth-Century Protestant Missionary Awakening in Its European Context,” both in Stanley (ed.), *Christian Missions and the Enlightenment*, Studies in the History of Christian Missions (Grand Rapids, 2001), 1–21 and 22–44.

<sup>21</sup> For a recent introduction into this concept, see Naim Ateek, Cedar Duaybis, Maurine Tobin, *Challenging Christian Zionism. Theology, Politics and the Israel-Palestine Conflict* (London, 2005).

Johann Ludwig Schneller is one of the prime examples. According to Loeffler, he was motivated by a “romantic longing” focused on the Holy Land, keeping him in the region despite the difficulties he encountered in the early years of his work. His concept of a “peaceful crusade” reflected the reformist aims of many of these missionaries, but also the sense of a continuity with, as well as a modification of, the Western Crusader heritage. Theodore Fliedner, the founder of the Kaiserswerth Deaconess organization, was part of the same German-Swiss tradition that motivated the Germans to take part in the establishment of the Anglo-Prussian bishopric in Jerusalem—another of those initiatives in which missionary, ecclesiastical and global political goals were closely connected. This also holds true for the establishment of the Latin patriarchate, which not only intended to counterbalance Protestant activities in the region, but also to weaken the position of the Franciscans, who were seen by many Roman Catholics in Europe as having become part of the ‘immobilité orientale’ that characterized the population of the Middle East (Buffon). The antagonism between Islam and Christianity, and the ‘dangers’ therefore inherent in living in a predominantly Muslim environment, return as themes in the papers on British missions, both in the piece on the missionary among Jewish females, Mathilda Creasy (Stockdale), and that on the CMS missionary hospital in Nablus (Bourmaud). Whereas real danger in both cases was either absent or unconnected with the rivalry between Islam and Christianity, the “danger narrative” was used effectively to underline the importance of missions and Western influence in general in this part of the world.

As much as the dangers, the publications for the home public stressed the romantic aspects of living and working in the Middle East. One of the authors that contributed to such an attractive view of the Middle East and its inhabitants was the American missionary William Thomson. In *The Land and the Book* he not only popularized biblical scholarship for a wide British-American readership but also legitimized the emergence of a Protestant form of pilgrimage, which included Palestine proper as well as Egypt and Syria. So, too, the American missionaries working in Eastern Anatolia, as mentioned in Merguerian’s paper on the Kharpert mission, were touched by the “romantic associations” of the area, close to Mount Ararat and the supposed site of the earthly Paradise. This romantic and spiritually charged aspect of the Christian Orientalist mind-set motivated many

of the missionaries to come to the Middle East and continue their work despite adverse circumstances. Some, like Schneller, were inspired by it to continue to focus also on the Muslim population of Palestine, despite the difficulties surrounding mission work among this group. Others, among whom many single women like Mathilda Creasy, worked for the conversion of the Jews, which was thought to be essential for the further success of Christian missions.<sup>22</sup>

However, the large majority of missionaries in the Middle East, especially in the period between 1840 and 1880, focused on the Middle-Eastern Christians. Indirectly, this choice also resulted from the Christian orientalist mind-set in which the Middle East occupied a crucial role in the history of the humankind as well as in the history of salvation. In the eyes of the missionaries, the Christians of the Middle East held an ambiguous position within the religious and social gamut of these societies. By their presence they reminded Western Christianity of the long and glorious history of Christianity in the region. At the same time, however, the poor state these Christians were in, religiously as well as politically, made blatantly clear that in the land of its birth Christianity had suffered serious setbacks that would not easily be repaired. According to the Western missionaries, the only way to remedy this evil was to convert these Christians to an evangelical type of religion, and to uplift them by education and modernization. This would not only restore Christianity to its former glory, but would also further the cause of Christianity among the Muslim population. This would happen by means of the growing missionary fervor of the Eastern Christians, as well as through the attraction this re-awakened Christianity would exert upon the Muslims of the Middle East.

The difficulties that arose between missionaries and Eastern Christians who were attracted to the missions, at least partly resulted from this ambivalent position of the missionaries towards autochthonous Christianity, an issue surfacing for instance in Bourmaud's article on the relationships between the CMS missionaries and Nabulsi Christians, as well as in Tamcke's article on Mahabad in the early twentieth century. There, the German missionaries intended to focus on the Muslims, but could not do so without the help of a German-trained

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<sup>22</sup> Similar forms and usages of geopiety were found among the Scottish missionaries in Palestine, compare Marten, *Attempting to Bring the Gospel Home*.

local Christian, an Assyrian missionary, who however at the same time was not allowed to occupy a position similar to the German missionaries. Apart from racist concepts that prevented German and American missionaries from treating the Assyrian pastor as an equal, they also thought that his faith, which they viewed as being more rationalist than theirs, was defective.<sup>23</sup> In conflicts such as this, the inherent tensions of the nineteenth-century missionary project, created by the ambition to bring 'new faith' in 'ancient lands' that already had more than their share of religious fervor, are exposed most poignantly.

*Conversion versus civilization*

One of the most persistent themes of mission in the nineteenth century was the missionaries' struggle with two supposedly parallel aims: converting the 'nominal' and non-Christians through public and private preaching, and enlightening and uplifting the population through education and social and medical care. In general, missionary organizations of the nineteenth century, including those supporting work in the Middle East, tended to see the second aim as supporting and facilitating the first, not as an end in itself. This being so, there were considerable differences in what such educational and social support should entail, and especially to what extent and level they were permitted in view of their basic subservience to the conversionist aim of the missions. As described in earlier literature, within the circles of the American Board the discussion was made explicit by one of its leading administrators, Rufus Anderson, who strongly propagated missions focusing on conversion and refraining from extensive activities in the field of higher education and medical care.<sup>24</sup> Although his opinions found support among some of the American Board's missionaries, those in the Middle East in general tended to be or become rather critical. In this volume, both the description of the

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<sup>23</sup> Notably, these Hermannsburg missionaries suspected the Assyrian missionary Lazarus Yaure of the same 'rationalist' ethos that Badr described as a point of discussion in Beirut in the early nineteenth century.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World. American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago, 1987) and Harris, "Denominationalism and Democracy", and *Nothing But Christ: Rufus Anderson and the Ideology of Protestant Foreign Missions* (New York, Oxford, 1999).



educational venture in Kharpert as well as that of the development of the American School for Girls in Beirut testify to the fact that missionaries on the ground, whatever their original point of view on the matter might have been, yielded to the pressures of local demand. In fact, on numerous occasions these missionaries were willing to oppose the administrators in America, especially over the issue of higher education. As a result, over the years the curriculum of many of these educational institutes secularized to a considerable extent, even if its foreign staff continued to believe in the possibility of encouraging conversion through the educational system.

A similar secularizing tendency is described by Loeffler in his article on the Syrian orphanage. The educational objects of this institution were different from that of the American institutions, focusing more on professional skills than on intellectual development, and on social stability more than on social ascent. Like the American educationalists, however, Schneller intended his school to instill Protestant piety into his pupils, by structuring the educational program through daily Bible reading and prayer in the orphanage chapel. Over the years, the curriculum not only advanced towards semi-academic training, but also became more secular in its outlook. As was the case with the American institutes for higher education, an explicitly conversionist aim was felt to hinder profitable educational developments, especially because schools focusing on conversion would not be successful in attracting pupils—not from the Eastern Christian, and certainly not from the Muslim population. Among the Jewish missions, such as the private one by Mathilda Creasy described by Stockdale, the same tension between the conversionist and ‘relief’ agendas can be detected.

In the Roman Catholic missions, too, the issue of education became more and more important. In fact, one of the reasons for curtailing the dominance of the Franciscan missionaries in the Holy Land was their lack of initiative precisely in this area of mission work. Rather than continuing the ‘presentative’ missionary methods of the Franciscans, the new orders, backed by the Propaganda, expected more results from active ventures in the field of education. Both the Jesuits in Syria and the Lazarists in Syria and Persia spent considerable time and money in the educational field.

As indicated in the article by Bourmaud, many missionary organizations saw hospitals and other medical activities as excellent opportunities to expose the local population to the Gospel message. Cheap

or free provision of medicines and good quality medical treatment brought parts of the population within reach of the missionaries that otherwise would not have come into contact with them. Among these were many women, who were attracted by the growing number of female physicians and nurses that were employed by the missions. Often, Bible readings and preaching would take place in waiting rooms and hospital wards, and while obligatory listening to these might have been seen as an acceptable price for better health, at least some of the missionaries tended to see such activities as the ultimate rationale of spending large amounts of money on well-equipped hospitals. In this respect, Stockdale notes that in the Jewish communities in Jerusalem such covert missionary methods induced the leaders to forbid their people to make use of the missionaries' social program. Ryad describes similar responses in early twentieth-century Egypt, when the Muslim community became increasingly wary of missionary influence on their communities.

When looking back on educational and medical mission work, it is clear that as strategies to foster conversions they have probably largely failed. Although they certainly might have contributed to the acceptance of the missions and the missionaries, and perhaps also increased Christian knowledge among non-Christian parts of the population, nowhere significant numbers of converts are reported.<sup>25</sup> That such unsuccessful enterprises continued to be funded by the home audiences (either within the context of the missionary organizations, or by setting up new charity funds to support them), should be attributed not only to the fact that in missionary reports conversions and interest in conversions received disproportionate attention (obscuring the relatively low numbers of conversions), but also to the fact that the introduction and development of education and medical health care were more and more seen as laudable aims in themselves, even when not generating conversions. A subtle shift in missionary aims, therefore, became discernible within the larger Protestant organizations. In this process of changing missionary aims, the local recipients of these Western initiatives played a crucial role. It was their

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<sup>25</sup> For some figures, compare Samuel M. Zemer, *Islam, A Challenge to Faith. Studies on the Mohammedan religion and the needs and opportunities of the Mohammedan world from the standpoint of Christian missions* (New York, 1907), 217–8, Julius Richter, *A History of Protestant Missions* (New York 1910/1970), 421 and O. Werner, *Katholischer Missions-Atlas* (Freiburg, 1885), 9 and 16–20.

acceptance or rejection of the various parts of missionary ideology and practice that led missionaries to explore additional ways to further change in the Middle Eastern communities, in addition to or in lieu of conversion to Western types of Christianity.

This being said, a final remark should be made in the discussion of the conversionist and civilizational aims of the missions in the nineteenth century. It is much easier to describe and analyze the missionaries' activities in the social, educational, literary and medical fields than it is to provide an accurate picture of the Evangelical message they preached, and of the way their message was received in the Middle East. The first type of activities was extensively described, both by the missionaries and by their historians. The larger part of the conversionist activities of the missionaries, however, has not been recorded and is therefore understood only imperfectly. The details of conversations in classrooms and private homes have been lost, and so have the local contributions to such exchanges, especially when not resulting in either conversion or clear-cut opposition. The texts of public sermons do not seem to have survived (possibly because missionary preachers preferred to preach from memory rather than from notes), and what is said on preaching in the missionaries' letters, have to my knowledge never been studied. Neither have the publications in the local languages, for instance Arabic, Modern Syriac (Modern Aramaic) or Armenian, so far received detailed attention. Most descriptions of the missionaries' message, therefore, are no more than educated guesses based on what is known from the missionaries' theological convictions as expressed in publications for the home public. Further study of missionary archives, in addition to the texts and publications by the recipients of their message, may be crucial to flesh out the actual contextual message of the missionaries.

However, whatever the contents and acceptance of the missionary message proper, at the end of the day the civilizational influences appear to have been the most enduring. These were the contributions that were appreciated and appropriated by considerable parts of the local population, much more so than the missionary message of conversion. To a large extent, a similar process was at work within the Roman Catholic missions, where, although a much larger part of the population became part of the Catholic Church via the uniate Eastern churches, the major attraction of Catholicism in the East, as of Protestantism, was education and medical care, over and above

the spiritual message of nineteenth-century Catholicism. Notably, as in the case of the Protestant missions, this does not deny the importance and sincerity of those converts that were primarily attracted to the spiritual alternative that Catholicism posed to Eastern Orthodoxy or Protestantism, examples of which feature in O'Mahony's contribution.

*Concluding remarks*

There can be little doubt that the nineteenth century, like the early stages of the Crusader period, constituted a time in which influences and developments from many different parts of society contributed to an ever-increasing Christian interest in the Middle East. The development of its missions, different from those in other parts of the world, is closely connected not only with the growth of Western political influence in the region, but also with that of 'geopiety' as expressed in pilgrimage and eschatological expectations. The blend of these three aspects, missionary, geopious and colonial, proved attractive to a considerable part of Western Christianity. From a minority interest within certain churches, the Holy Land discourse became one of the major forces in the political arena of many countries with a Christian majority. One of the conclusions of the conference and the volume is that missionaries from all denominations and countries, despite their considerable differences, were major representatives and propagandists of this nineteenth-century type of Christian Orientalism.

In the early twenty-first century, the legacy of these nineteenth-century missionaries is still among us: in the ubiquitous Western fascination with the Middle East, in the dualistic and often antagonistic interpretations of East and West, in the ambiguous relationships between Jews, Christians and Muslims, and in the conflicting interpretations of the missionaries' contributions to the religious and societal development of the Middle East. However, this book testifies to the fact that also the legacy of true encounters between individuals from largely different backgrounds is still among us, encounters that gave birth to the formation of a common history as well as to commonly shared hopes and ideals.